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ABSTRACT

An Australian conference for lecturers in educational administration was disrupted by a group dubbed "The Empty Set," which explored the political nature of knowledge and practice in educational administration. The group claims that most of educational administration's major research themes are derived from noneducational areas. Stating that such teaching does not address the problems of practitioners, they argue that, as a field of inquiry, educational administration should explore the role people in schools and systems play in the creation and manipulation of information. Implying that ideological and methodological hegemonies are being sustained by the texts in common use, alternative materials and authors are cited. Research supervisors are admonished to encourage students to interact and share ideas, and to present and publish papers. Suggestions are offered for the annual Australasian conference. (MLF)

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THE EMPTY SET AND TEACHING EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: AN AUSTRALASIAN DREAMING.

R.J.S. Macpherson and W.L. Edwards.

... "My Road, My Rown Road
I go look dat Road, my Rown, my Dream Road,
Road belong 'o I, must-be find him by-'n'-by
My Road, my Rown Road ..."

Prindy's Dreaming Song[1]

INTRODUCTION

The 2nd National Conference for Lecturers in Educational Administration held at Macquarie University, Australia (August 1982) witnessed a rare phenomenon. The first morning of proceedings were disrupted by persistent declarations of resistance to the facilitation of what were termed 'neo-OD' problem-solving processes being used to canalize discussion. A self-selected group then chose to create its own agendas and facilitation. Dubbed 'The Empty Set', the group explored the political nature of knowledge and practice in educational administration. This report seeks to clarify the values search and emergent commitments of The Empty Set, and proposes to share these ideas with other teachers of educational administration, particularly in Australasia.

Detailed notes of the group's discussion were compiled by the writers, and the early drafts of this paper were modified and validated by group members. Some retain personal positions on particular issues, but to cite one member, this account "... undoubtedly captures the essence of the discussion ...". It therefore cannot pretend to be an academic argument; it is instead a sharing of the thoughts and feelings of some concerned academics.

This statement is presented almost in telegram language to be we hope, as explicit and as contestable as values.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ON WHAT WE TEACH, AND OUR SEARCH FOR CHANGE

Central to our teaching, and to the processes and structures of educational administration, is the personal problem of deciding. Our agency[2] mirrors our values and self, and what do we see?

As teachers of educational administration we decide to present the recanted[3] and often discredited theory of our field (perhaps critically appraising it) as a trade-off to the credentialism press. With few exceptions, we use the functionalist paradigm[4] to underpin our presentation of our field. The result is implausibility - it doesn't work - client dissatisfaction, and intellectual turmoil.

Thus we begin with the question: how many more 'giants' need to recant before each of us comes to terms with the notion of personal reeducation as a legitimate (perhaps overdue) exercise? We recognize the contested nature of knowledge, and practice as values-in-action. Our self appraisal as teachers indicates our involvement in a hegemony of legitimation, that too often serves purposes of control custom and convenience rather than betterment. We believe, for example, that to consider educational administration as a form of administrative science, effectively sanctions the preclusion of ethical, cultural and political considerations in strategy formulation. Even the texts we use are culturally bounded and often quite alien, and those that are not substantially functionalist in content are citeable exceptions.[5] We remain unimpressed by psychologism, by number-crunching, and instead enjoy deeper ideological affinities with those teaching Sociology, the Humanities, or Social and Welfare Administration. It is important to note that our students are not only school administrators, and that increasingly demand for places on courses is from other sectors of education - TAFE and central systems personnel - and from other sectors of human service - health, public service and welfare agencies.

There are many fundamental contradictions in our field yet to be confronted. For example, the publications of our field focus on schools,

as has much of our teaching, and whereas principals are rare as students, aspirants abound! Most of our field's major research themes (climate, leadership, decision-making, etc.) are derived from non-educational arenas. The recurrent themes of decades of feedback from practitioners has sought to tell us that we are not addressing their problems. The metaphors, themes and rituals of our theory are found to be as loosely-coupled and as ephemeral as natural systems modelling.

Our personal decision to find a new way as learners/teachers of educational administration, suggests in turn we begin to build a more potent curriculum for our purposes in an Australian context.

ON WHAT MIGHT WE TEACH, AND HOW

Rather than begin with the tenets of organizational theory, content perhaps might instead address the construction of organizational 'reality', and the reproduction of consciousness.[7] Attention might be given to issues such as: the ways by which adults learn,[8] how they reproduce their learning within and with schools,[9] the mobilization of bias, cultural reproduction,[10] and the exercise of power and control in educational settings.[11] We would argue that teaching administrative technology should be embedded into the study of the legitimating functions of education and administration,[12] the nature and functions of negotiation[13] and participation, and the nature of administrative practice and processes as domination or emancipation.[14] We need an explicitly ethical and philosophical stance to complement and underpin our predeliction for action and change facilitation.

Of central interest to us is the production, manipulation, reification and contestation of knowledge. We would urge administrators to explore the role people in schools and systems play in the creation and manipulation of information. The myths and metaphors of administration deserve close analysis,[15] as does the structuration of systems.[16] The processes used to grant graded access to forms of knowledge interest us, as do the questions of social and economic

equity in education.

It follows that the teaching and the learning of educational administration,[17] to be consistent, ought to be a liberating and practical experience. Hence our commitment to furthering experiential modes of teaching and learning, especially the design of local structured experiences using purpose and context-specific monographs and processes. As individual liberation, relevance, sense-making and development are our guiding principles, we also anticipate encultured expectations for teacher-centred knowledge transmission. This means that we will be obliged to complement contracted assignment activities and assessment techniques with informal supportive consultative services well in excess of current teacher:student contact time. But before discussing methodological issues, how do we propose to take charge of our own growth?

HOW CAN WE SHIFT OUR VALUES?

We noted above the recanting of the giants in our field, and we Empty Set pygmies can report feeling extremely refreshed by adopting the same process. Having implied an ideological hegemony being sustained by the nature of the texts in common use, we are committed to encouraging and producing alternative information.

Examples already exist in different forms. The Deakin Monograph Series,particularly those authored by Popkewitz, Iannaconne, Giroux, Boyd, Watkins, Foster, and two Australasians (Bates and Gronn) will soon be available. We enjoyed Sungaila's[18] response to Riffel,[19] Hannah's[20] stimulation of Hatchard and Ross,[21] and point to the lively challenges posed in Ogilvie's course materials.[22] The Monash video interviews[23] of Greenfield, Foster and Iannaccone are soon to be available at cost, and many group members reported teaching activities encapsulating ideas and approaches consistent with our purposes.

As academics, in a field of research, we also take it as a fundamental responsibility to challenge methodological hegemonies. We

therefore welcome Gronn's[24] forthcoming demonstration that neo-Taylorism characterises many recent Australian studies in educational administration. Are we to remain locked into a post Mintzberg era, bewitched by Wolcott's[25] ethnography? Might we debate why our Ed Bells are not involved as the 'key instrument' of sense-making, or why agency is so seldom related to person position structure structuration or time? Is more effective theory and practice likely to emerge from what Geertz[26] terms the 'think description' of actual events constituting the culture of an educational organization - disciplined and accurate description which is rigorously interpreted in the search for explanation?

We hold that Morgan's[27] radical humanist critique has served as a very timely warning, demonstrating that the discipline of organization theory has been imprisoned by its own metaphors. Asserting theoretical and methodological pluralism, and encouraging critical policy analysis are interesting catch-cries that seem to forestall rather than foreshadow action.

We have marked our point-of-growth from the pragmatic orthodoxy of Willower[28] (recently echoed in Beare's corporate eclecticism,[29] in turn challenged by Bates[30]) by a collective act of resistance and values search at the Conference, and in producing this statement.

To develop will require us drawing on more fundamental resources; such as Habermas,[31] Adorno,[32], Horkheimer,[33] Marcuse,[34] Bourdieu,[35] Giroux[36] and Friere.[37] This calls for substantial scholarship, even endurance, but the nexus between their critical thought and our field has already been effectively established by Foster[38] and Bates.[39] The prize is substantial; educational administration as a force for emancipation. Could this be the raison d'etre for our field?

More immediately, 'The Empty Set' is exhibiting commitment by contracted exchanges through our 'Zerox College'. (Xerox is a registered tradename, and in set theory, an empty set is equivalent to zero.)

Looking ahead, we suggest reconstituting our annual Australasian conference in form;

a. to accommodate an Expo/Clearing House exercise for the exchange of draft articles, simulations, case-studies, annotated bibliographies, course materials, etc.;

b. to be stimulated by a commissioned debate (perhaps Miskel and Giroux); and

c. to examine the realities of emerging educational policies - i.e. seek to anticipate the outcomes and effects of the decisions emanating from bodies influencing or formulating policies for contemporary and future education.

Perhaps as an illustrative exercise, the conference might examine the publication policies of Australasian educational administration forums. A bid, only half in jest, was made for the 1984 Conference to be in Canberra; to be entitled 'Orwell Revisited'.

AS RESEARCH SUPERVISORS - WHAT OF METHODOLOGY?

We are troubled by the student control ideology so explicit in supervision policies. Examples abound of middle-range (largely armchair) theory begetting dynastic patterns of research. Elaborated fictions are being based on dated, derived and reified social constructs. (Citations are possible, but are considered inappropriate.)

Research, to our group, is a learning experience to be nurtured as sense-making by the student. The clarification of purpose is considered a crucial and incremental process, and should exhibit the elements of an individual values search. To have practical as well as theoretical purpose, it could well incorporate action research. We accord particularly high value to phenomenological, ethnographic and hermeneutic case-studies, but would urge the use of critical perspectives in later phases.

A major question unresolved is how to research micro events with a view to reconstructing Australasian grounded[40] middle-range theory,

yet remaining cognizant of macro critical concerns. In other words, for researchers, what implications are there in the theoretical nexus between the thoughts of (say) Schutz and Giddens, Greenfield and Giroux, or Mead and Habermas? But to remain consistent with our earlier views, we hope for an expansion of non-Tayloristic case-study data to facilitate middle-range theoretical initiatives, and critical appraisals. Finally, it appears to us that supervisors should encourage students far more to interact and share ideas, and to present and publish papers. Rapid theory growth will be fostered in a trustful, supportive, vigorous and-yet-rigorous dialectic environment. Our role is to facilitate administrators-as-researchers.

CONCLUDING NOTE

This article started with a quotation to indicate that 'The Empty Set'[41] has declared a new Dreamtime as a legitimate exercise for teachers of educational administration in Australasia. We suspect that each of us will continue finding our 'Rown Road' anyway, and we offer in good faith, The Empty Set Dream Road to our colleagues. It is however, pertinent to recall why Prindy's Dreaming Song so disturbed all those who heard it. It is to question one's own Dreaming, the shared heritage that one is born to, and thus, it is to contest what is taken for granted and held dear.

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   or consider

   Greenfields, T.B. (1975). "Theory About Organization: A New Perspective and the Implications for Schools" in Hughes, M.G. (ed.), Administering Education. London: Athlone Press, pp.71-99.

   In his Deakin monograph (forthcoming), Gronn, P. closely examines 'Rethinking Educational Administration: T.B. Greenfield and his Critics', and teases out the creeping skepticism since the 1974 Bristol conference.

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23. Conducted by Macpherson, R.J.S., Faculty of Education, Monash University.

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41. Members included R.J. Bates*(Deakin), D.K. Briggs (Flinders), B. Foster*(San Diego), W.L. Edwards (Massey), T.J. Lane*(UNE), A. Lindsay (Macquarie), R.J.S. Macpherson (Monash), L. Miller (Queensland), B. Mulford (Canberra), P.W. O'Brien (Flinders) and M. Urvet (Melbourne).
    * Partial involvement due to other commitments.